

It's early morning and the booming voice of Bob Martin rings out down a Skype connection from Rio de Janeiro in Brazil, where the sports photography veteran is shooting the 2016 Olympics preview events. An alumni of the Allsport photography agency, his career has stretched over 30 years and now, in his late 50s, more than 200 of his best sports images feature in the new coffee-table book *1/1000th: The Sports Photography of Bob Martin*.

His love of photography dates back to his days as a young boy, 'I was mad about photography when I was at school. To be honest I was more mad about the printing and processing bit. It was in the days even before resin-coated paper; processing films on spirals and printing black & whites in trays. I liked the process more than the creative side of photography to start with.'

In fact, Bob's first published picture – a mid-air shot from a motocross scrambling trial – was printed in *The Surrey Comet* newspaper while he was still at school. After abandoning thoughts of a career as a vet, which he admits was 'beyond my intellectual ability', Bob took a gap year in which his father hoped he would 'get the photography out of me', but fast forward over 30 years and that clearly never happened.

He took a job with a commercial and industrial photographer shooting interiors and then worked at Imperial College London as a photographic technician. Bob recalls, 'During that period, in my early 20s, I always wanted to be a newspaper photographer – it was in the days when *The Express* had 30 staff photographers and a room where they would sit waiting to get sent on their assignments. That world really appealed to me.'

#### Early days at Allsport

He adds, 'Then a job came up in the darkrooms at Allsport [sports agency] and I jumped at it, not because I wanted to be a sports photographer but it was like a stepping stone in to press photography. At Allsport the deal was you processed and printed all week and then, if you wanted and were keen, you could go out and photograph at weekends. I got bitten by the sports photography bug when I was out at weekends shooting.'

'The early days of Allsport were fantastic for me – I learnt how to be



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a working photographer in a rough world. We had a great time in those early days – we had some fantastic photographers working together. There was me, Simon Bruty, Pascal Rondeau, Shaun Botterill – all really great photographers. We had Chris Cole as well, who's now stopped shooting sport, but was one of the real natural photographers around.'

Bob's high levels of professionalism were honed at Allsport. 'You used to come in

Award-winning sports photographer **Bob Martin's** impressive images feature in his new coffee-table book *1/1000th*. He talks to **Steve Fairclough** about his 30-year career and his life-long love of photography

# The sports illustrator



On a Monday morning and the good pictures had a red dot stuck on them. The transparencies that were really good were “red dots”. You’d sit round the lightbox and look at each other’s “red dots” – you slagged each other off if you had a bad shoot or tapped each other on the shoulder if you had a good shoot. I think that Monday morning meeting where you looked at what the others had done, and what you’d done, was a real growth part in my career and made me aspire to do better. That really helped to develop me as a photographer.’

#### Joining *Sports Illustrated*

Following his stint at Allsport, Bob went to work for the legendary US sports publication *Sports Illustrated*. He reveals, ‘I had the harsh realisation that it wasn’t about taking 20 good pictures on one day – it was about taking one.

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That was the other thing that really made me as a photographer. Working for a magazine like that meant you could shoot for about six days to get one picture and it wasn’t a problem, they didn’t mind.’

Bob adds, ‘I went off to The Masters as one of my early jobs for *Sports Illustrated*, brought the pictures in to [*Sports Illustrated’s* then director of photography] Heinz Klutmeier and I thought I’d hit the big time – I’d got loads of pictures in the magazine and he said, “Well, you didn’t get the main one did you? You didn’t get the best picture. It’s about getting the best picture.”

‘That brought it home to me that when you went out, you went after the best picture – if you went after the best picture you had a chance of getting the best picture. You should be aspiring to greatness all the time – that’s how I photograph now. I don’t just go and try and get

something in the bag – all the time I go hell for leather for the great picture and that’s what I’m about.’

Given the longevity in his career Bob has spanned the film-to-digital era, but he doesn’t yearn for days gone by. ‘I think the new cameras are fantastic – they made me far more capable of taking a good picture, so how could I dislike them? Some people hark back but I didn’t really like follow focus and in many ways the technology helped my career. If autofocus in particular hadn’t come along I don’t think I’d be a sports photographer now – I think it helped my career.’

He continues, ‘Modern-day sports photography is a really creative thing – you have to have lots of content and a creative look to your photographs. It’s not just about “here’s the latest 100-metre runner with his feet off the ground”, which it was in the early days. It was a technician’s thing – the good people

were those who were great at follow focusing and great at handling the cameras, which I wasn’t. Technology has helped my career and it helped make sports photography a more creative genre.’

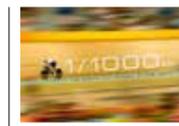
#### Equipment choices

Bob admits, ‘I’m very much a technical nutcase over equipment. I’ve always had as much equipment as I can afford or lay my hands on. My standard bodies are Nikon D4Ss but I also use a D810 for feature work, because it gets a bigger file, and for some commercial jobs because advertising agencies want big files, so I shoot on the D810 for the advertising or portrait work. For my normal work the D4S is my main workhorse. I have a lot of bodies because I don’t like changing lenses when I’m shooting, so I put one on each lens. I have all the lenses from 600mm down to 16mm.

‘The greatest thing about digital

photography, which gets slagged by a lot of photographers, is the LCD on the back of the camera – it’s kind of like having a Polaroid back on your camera. If you’re experimenting with a pan you can shoot a few frames and look at it – in the days of film you couldn’t look at it until you processed it. I use it all the time; it’s an integral way of how I work. I shoot a picture, look at it and think about it, adjust settings, adjust the colour balance and adjust the profile.’

He swears by shooting raw files but doesn’t re-touch his images much, except for those in his portfolio. ‘I shoot raw all the time – I’m a great believer in that if you’re not using raw, you’re not using the full potential of your camera. The ones that I supply to my customers are opened from the raw file and are tweaked from a colour tone and sharpness point of view, then sent off to the customer.’



#### 1/1000th Reader offer

Amateur Photographer readers can purchase Bob Martin’s book *1/1000th* for the reduced offer price of £40 (a saving of 20% on the usual price), plus p&p, simply by ordering from the book’s website [www.1-1000th.com](http://www.1-1000th.com) and entering ‘AP’ as the promotion code on the checkout page.

#### The story of 1/1000th

When quizzed about the title of his book Bob replies, ‘That was originally the highest shutter speed that cameras went to and it was used an awful lot in the earlier days of sports photography. You tend now to use higher shutters speeds and the stopping ability of digital cameras doesn’t seem to relate to the stopping ability of film cameras, which I find quite strange – 1/1000th of a second would stop almost anything on film but I wouldn’t go below about 1/1250th or 1/1600th of a second on digital to have that same stopping ability.’

He had wanted to do a book for some time but it wasn’t until recently that he obtained the required sponsorship, chiefly from Nikon, to make it happen. ‘A lot of the pictures in it are obviously quite old, because it’s a retrospective of my career, but I think it reflects where I am today as



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well and I'm pretty pleased with it as a body of work. It's certainly got rave reviews from my fellow photographers, which is quite flattering.'

He adds, 'It was easier than I thought to choose the basic set of pictures that would go in, but it was far more difficult to say "no" to some of them because a lot of pictures got left out as well. But you have to choose pictures that work together. It's a book that can sit on a coffee table, can be opened up, can be looked at and you can put it down and come back to it later.'

The book is dotted with Bob's background caption information on each image and contributions from colleagues such as photographers

Simon Bruty and John French and sports writers SL Price and Robert Philip. Bob notes, 'I think they're really nice reads and for someone who's interested in sport it's also quite a nice book. I didn't just want it to be a photographers' book – I wanted it to be something a sports fan would pick up.'

Bob cites a picture that won him the World Press Photo Sports Picture of the Year in 2005 as one of his stand-out images. 'The other one that people talk about is the paralympic picture, from the Athens Olympics, of the swimmer [Xavi Torres] where he left his legs behind on the starting blocks. That won me more awards than any other picture so, therefore, I suppose it's my best picture.'



Bob Martin is a multi award-winning sports photographer. His photographs have been published in numerous publications including *Sports Illustrated*, *Time*, *The Sunday Times* and *The New York Times*. In 2005 he won the World Press Photo Sports Picture of the Year. He was the photo chief for the London 2012 Olympics and is now a consultant to the International Olympic Committee. Visit [www.bobmartin.com](http://www.bobmartin.com)

### Ambitions and the future

In the past decade or so Bob has branched out from shooting and since 2005 has co-ordinated the official photography for the Wimbledon Championships. He was also photo chief for the London 2012 Olympics and is currently a consultant to the International Olympic Committee (IOC) and the Rio 2016 Olympics. He reveals, 'I'm still shooting about 60% of the time. Other stuff has come along, but it wasn't on purpose. At Wimbledon I shoot as well – I'm one of the photographic team, but I just head it up and I help and advise them on matters photographic. The same goes for the IOC for the Rio Olympic Committee. So I mix it up a bit.'

With such a wealth of major sporting events under his belt is there anything Bob would still like to shoot that he hasn't? 'I'd like to photograph a Super Bowl; I've never been to a Super Bowl. The only reason I want to go to it is that it's that one world-class event that I haven't been to. I've been to a World Cup Final, world championships and tons of Olympics but never to a Super Bowl.'

He adds, 'I've been very, very lucky in my career with where I've worked, what I've done and what I've managed to achieve. I've fallen on my feet. I want to keep on trying to remember to re-invent myself and to try to aspire to be different. I guess when you fade away is when you don't manage that.'



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